

PAROLE NEWS

Ex-offenders Gain Confidence, Motivation During Intensive Residential Program

Five parolees have been enrolled for the past three months in an intensive, 14-week job training and skills development program at St. Francis House, a residential program and homeless shelter in Boston.

As part of the program, known as the Moving Ahead Program (MAP), the parolees are integrated with a small group of other ex-offenders, all of whom have a history of substance abuse. They program is open to men and women, and participants are provided with housing offsite. The Parole Board has provided funding for parolees to participate in the program through the Violent Incar-



Parole Board Chairman Maureen Walsh presents flowers to Region 1 Word Processing Operator Ellen Starck at the annual agency-wide meeting on December 15. Ms. Starck has worked for the Parole Board for 40 years. Parole Board Executive Director Donald Giancioppo (right) holds an honorary plaque for Ms. Starck.

Photograph by Paul Gallagher

carceration/Truth in Sentencing (VOI/TIS) grant.

Typically, there are 12-14 students in each MAP class. For the first half of the program, students are in class Monday through Wednesday from 9 AM to 3 PM, and Thursday and Friday from 9 AM to noon. During the second half of the program, students participate in a four-week-long internship at a company, business, or institution where they would like to work.

During the first phase, students map out their histories—the good and the bad—in an effort to figure out what their skills, passions, and goals are. The exploration supports the program's aim of drawing on the students' existing skills and transforming them into vocational interests. "The point is not to focus on what's wrong, but what's good," said MAP instructor Tony Rello. "We look at everything, for example, it requires substantial skills to live on the streets," he said.

During class on a Monday afternoon, six students practiced mock interviews with Mr. Rello. After preparing a series of questions and writing them on the board, two students acted out an interview for a cook's job. The student playing the employer asked most of the expected questions: Why did you leave your last job? What kind of experience do you have? What makes you interested in this job? But, inevitably, Mr. Rello pushed them to ask the less routine, more difficult question, the one they needed to practice the most. "You answered on the application next to the question, 'Have you ever committed a felony,' 'Will discuss at interview,' (continued on page 6)



Chairman's Column

Parole Board Chairman, Maureen Walsh

Happy Holidays!

As I am writing this column one day after our third annual agency meeting, I will try my hardest not to be repetitive!

However, some good news is definitely worthy of repetition, such as the recognition of Ellen Starck as an employee who recently celebrated her fortieth year with the Massachusetts Parole Board. While, under any circumstances, being employed in one agency for this amount of time is a significant accomplishment standing on its own, I think what is even more remarkable is that, after so many years with this agency, Ellen continues to have a positive and professional attitude toward her work and her co-workers. Ellen is a team player in every sense of the word and we are so fortunate to have her continue her excellent work. She truly embodies the spirit of Parole in so many ways, and I am proud to have been a part of the small celebration with her yesterday!

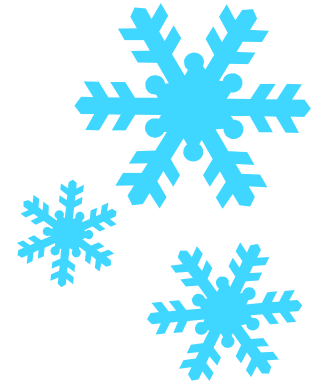
“Ellen Starck is a team player in every sense of the word, and we are so fortunate to have her continue her excellent work.”

-Parole Board Chairman Maureen Walsh commenting on the work of Ellen Starck who has been with the agency for 40 years

I also want to take this time at the end of the year to thank each and every one of you who have helped in so many ways to improve our agency and the reentry system for offenders. Whether it has been victim service issues and notifications, reentry data and reporting, performance measurements, or IT training, or a variety of other issues, so many people have 110 percent of their effort, and it definitely shows. As we highlighted at the agency meeting, we certainly have had a year of changes, some big and some small. Through it all, it has been so helpful to rely on individuals in the agency, both in “getting the job done,” but also in letting us know if we are missing opportunities or need to revisit a particular issue. It is only by receiving this feedback and working on improvements that we change the course or design of the agency. Two examples of this that quickly come to mind is that concept of the Regional Reentry Cents and the SPIRIT computer system. Each has evolved during the year and we are constantly looking at ways to improve what we have built upon and replicate “what works.”

No doubt that come January, the agency will continue to change in many ways. We expect that postings will be forthcoming to expand the Intensive Parole for Sex Offender [IPSO] program into more regional offices and we also expect some further growth with the Interstate Compact Unit. In the upcoming months, we are also expecting that we will be able to move our central office to a more permanent and professional location. I am sure that more announcements and initiatives will be occurring soon after the New Year.

In the meanwhile, I wish you all a healthy and happy Holiday Season! Thank you for all of your hard work on behalf of the Agency!!



Profile:

Parole Board Member Deborah McDonagh

Parole News will profile one of the six Parole Board members each month. This month features Deborah McDonagh, who was appointed to the Board in 2004

Deborah McDonagh has served in a variety of human service and criminal justice positions in her twenty plus years in state government, including Director of the Juvenile Justice Partnership Program for the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. Prior to her appointment to the Board, she served as Community Relations Director for the Suffolk County District Attorney's office.

Ms. McDonagh received a Bachelor's degree in Sociology/Social Work from Boston State College. She is a member of Family Services of Greater Boston, and has in the past been affiliated with Latinos y Niños, Citizens for Juvenile Justice, and the Boston Coalition for Substance Abuse and Violence Reduction.



Parole Board member Deborah McDonagh joined the Board in 2004.

Viewing it as a chance to use all of the knowledge she accrued over twenty years working in human services and criminal justice, Ms. McDonagh decided to seek a position on the Parole Board. "It represented a challenge to tap those experiences in a unique forum that serves a critical public safety role and continues my commitment to public service," she said.

Ms. McDonagh derives satisfaction from performing an important public service, as well as from the challenge of making a very crucial decision: one which involves weighing the rehabilitative benefits of parole versus the potential impact of parole on the victim and the community.

Ms. McDonagh is especially happy to be with the Board at a time when the agency is growing and enjoying tremendous support from Governor Mitt Romney, Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey, and Secretary of Public Safety Edward Flynn. "Under Chairman Walsh's leadership, we are moving forward by developing policies and practices which will strengthen us and ultimately increase public safety," she said. "I actually enjoy policy development and I feel I couldn't be here at a better time."

For Ms. McDonagh, the most challenging aspect of the job is to witness the suffering of victims and, at the same time, to approach each case with neutrality. "Although it can be difficult for the victims and the public to accept, our system of justice allows for parole by recognizing rehabilitation and the benefit of supervised release," she said.

While she feels that all of her cumulative experiences have played a part in her work on the Board, she draws most from her experiences as a social worker for the Department of Social Services (DSS), and as Victim Witness Director and Community Relations Director for the District Attorney's office. "I often see in offenders the children I served at DSS who grew up in chaos with tremendous deprivation. In the DA's office, I met people whose lives have been forever changed by violent crime, and learned from those living in high crime areas that there is no such thing as a victimless crime. I believe the combination of these experiences helps me strike balance every day."

PAROLE BOARD AND THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION:

Working together for Effective Programming

The Parole Board and the Department of Correction [DOC] have entered into an historic partnership that symbolizes the two agencies' commitment to public safety.

Collaboratively, the two agencies have spent countless hours crafting a reentry plan that starts on the day of incarceration and extends into the community.

"This is a real opportunity for silo-busting," said Kira Dunn, Director of Reentry for the Parole Board. "The reentry initiative compels multiple state agencies and non-profit community-based partners to the table to pursue a common goal—community safety. We are lucky to have an incredibly talented and dedicated staff in the field who believe in the mission of the work," she said.

The enormous amount of detail in the reentry initiative requires constant and clear communication between Parole and DOC.

Because no two people are the same, no two discharges are exactly the same. Before they are discharged, state inmates make plans to

utilize Parole's Regional Reentry Centers [RRC's]. The DOC reentry planning team secures access to community-based health providers, identifies housing and health needs, and makes arrangements with state transportation to bring the offender to the RRC. Upon arrival, the Parole Board's reentry team picks up the ball to make sure these plans become a reality.

"The collaborative case management approach to successful offender reentry is critical to its success," said DOC Director of Reentry Services Geralyn Riley. "The DOC staff, most notably the Correction Program Officers, are the backbone of this initiative and have made the necessary adjustments with professionalism and integrity. I anticipate this will continue as we move forward with this newfound partnership," she added. In addition to assisting the offender with release plans he or she made in custody, Parole Board Reentry Officers take a hands on, detailed approach to identifying the offender's immediate needs, including urgent care, emergency (continued on page 5)



Parole Board Director of Reentry Kira Dunn (left) and DOC Director Gerri Riley stand with the Red Sox World Series Trophy at the DOC headquarters in Milford.

Mandatory Post-release Supervision Legislation Update:

Lieutenant Governor Healey and Secretary Flynn Support bill at November hearing

Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey and Secretary of Public Safety Edward Flynn testified last month in favor of legislation that would allow for mandatory post-release supervision of ex-offenders. Supervision would be conducted by either probation or parole officials for a period between nine months and 25 percent of the offender's maximum term of incarceration.

Their testimony was heard at a Judiciary Committee legislative hearing at the State House on November 22.

Forty-two percent of state prisoners return to the streets without supervision, said Lieutenant Governor Healey, and forty percent of maximum-security inmates return without court-mandated monitoring. This is a compelling reason for the public to put a system into place that thoroughly monitors prisoner reentry, she said.

If passed, this legislation would prevent offenders from waiving their right to parole to avoid supervision. Studies have shown that offenders are less likely to commit new crimes if supervised in the community for a period of time after release, rather than shifting from prison directly to independent living. As it stands now, 49 percent of Massachusetts criminal offenders commit new crimes within 12 months of their release.

In addition to cutting back on recidivism, said Healey, community supervision also saves money; it costs a maximum of \$4,000 per year to supervise an offender in the community versus the \$43,000 per year cost of incarceration.

Lieutenant Governor Healey stressed that by aggressively supervising the most high-risk offenders, it will be possible to anticipate a relapse before a crime occurs. Preventing this return to crime will ease strain on the courts, the probation and parole systems, and the police, she said, stressing to the committee that post-release supervision is something that needs to get done.

Offenders deemed sexually dangerous who are on lifetime community parole would not be covered under the bill and are not eligible for decreases in sentences.

Parole Board hires Job Coach to Promote Ex-offender Employment

A new Job Coach hired this month by the Parole Board will help identify businesses and companies in each parole region that are willing to hire ex-offenders.

"I'll be reaching out to businesses, making sure they're aware of federal bonds and tax credits," said Tony Cornetta, the agency's new Job Coach. Mr. Cornetta, who started in mid-December, is based out of the Reentry Unit in Boston, but will spend most of his time traveling around the state, meeting with potential employers.

Mr. Cornetta was hired to assist Director of Reemployment Dave Sullivan in the enormous project to ensure that all offenders released from jails and prisons have access to the skills training, guidance, and job opportunities they need to have a chance at starting a fresh, positive, and crime-free life.

One half of this equation is providing ex-offenders with training opportunities, interviewing skills, and resume building. The other half is helping encourage employers that ex-offenders can be valuable additions to their workforce. "I'll be selling the benefits of hiring an ex-offender. If he's close to getting the job, I'll go out there and meet with the employer," said Mr. Cornetta. In addition, Mr. Cornetta will act as a contact for the employer throughout the ex-offender's employment; if any problems arise, the employer has the option of asking Mr. Cornetta for assistance.

Mr. Cornetta said that his strategy will be to start by building up employer contacts in one or two regions, get some success going there, and then move on to the rest of the state. Some of the businesses he has already reached out to include warehouse companies, Home Depot, Stop & Shop, and Dunkin' Donuts.

Unsurprisingly, he anticipates that one of his bigger challenges will be finding employment for offenders who have committed violent crimes, as well as for sex offenders.

"It's tough. Employers are apprehensive to begin with. We're trying to figure out how to get past that obstacle," he said. Mr. Cornetta received a Bachelor's degree in criminal justice from the University of Hartford. After graduating from college, he worked for five years as a job developer in the healthcare field, finding jobs for medical professionals.



Job Coach Tony Cornetta joined the Parole Board this month to assist Director of Reemployment Dave Sullivan in finding employment opportunities for ex-offenders

As part of the Regional Reentry Center (RRC) Initiative, eight Substance Abuse Coordinators (SAC's) were hired and assigned to each of the eight regional parole offices. Last month's Parole News featured SAC's Lisa Jean of Region 6 (Lawrence), Linda Mazak of Region 1 (Quincy), Desiree Huff of Region 2 (Quincy), and Steve Bisson of Region 9 (Framingham). This month features SAC Liz Beach of the Region 4 (Worcester) parole office. Look to next month's newsletter for more SAC profiles.

Substance Abuse Counselors Bring Experience, Dedication to Parole Offices

Worcester SAC Liz Beach is so busy meeting with clients all day, she says she barely sees a lunch break. Between helping her clients find housing, obtain their social security cards, their GED, and job referrals, she has her hands full.

But Ms. Beach is certainly prepared for the challenge, having worked as a victim/witness advocate in a District Attorney's office and directed job development, anger management, and mental health programs for ex-offenders at one of the Department of Correction's Community Resource Centers. She also worked as a senior counselor at the mandated drug court in Worcester District Court. She received her Bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Ana Maria College, and held an internship in probation as a student.

Ms. Beach helps her clients with a host of issues: housing, sex offender counseling, transportation, GED classes, and job referrals. Between juggling her clients' needs and all their paperwork, she stays busy.

Although it's easy to get caught up in the work, Ms. Beach strives to maintain boundaries with her clients and resists becoming frustrated if they get offtrack. "I just had a client who overdosed yesterday. Now she's back in jail, back in Framingham...It's my job to put all the things into place. It's not by job to go after them. It's their job to do what the Parole Officer says, to stay clean. I don't own their decisions," she said.

PAROLE/DOC Reentry Partnership (continued from page 4)

housing, a trip to the Registry of Motor Vehicles, and the bank, as well as providing a start in the reemployment process.

Both DOC and Parole continue to refine the details of the initiative, working collaboratively and leveraging the strength of their partnership towards effective statewide planning. Recognizing that the best chance for affecting positive change in the system is through collaboration, the Parole Board and DOC plan to build a technology bridge between their respective offender tracking systems, increasing face-to-face communication between key staff and adapting plans as opportunities arise.

St. Francis House (continued from page 1)

Mr. Rello prompted. "Could you talk about it now, please?" The student playing the role of jobseeker, a soft spoken man named John,* explained calmly that he had an addiction to drugs and he ended up in prison as a result. Since then, however, he has changed and worked hard to begin a new life. "I took courses in prison, I fought hard to be a better man...I consider this job as an opportunity to continue bettering myself," he said.

Mr. Rello encouraged John to be careful not to give the employer more information than necessary, and to focus on the positive steps he has taken. "It's not the norm they ask you [what your crime was]," said Mr. Rello. It's not about asking the employer to take a chance with you, he told the students, it's about convincing the employer why your experiences actually make you a better employee.

Rita Harris, a St. Francis House volunteer, agreed. "As a former employee, I know that if you move on from that to positive things, you've quickly moved away from your former self," and the employer also tends to move onto the positive, she said.

John's classmates gave him encouraging feedback and commended his overall performance. For a group of people who have led very tough lives, the men are extremely kind, courteous, and supportive of each other. They seem genuinely eager to learn.

After class, a few of the men stayed behind to ask Mr. Rello questions or to fine tune their resumes. Three of the men spoke openly about their troubled pasts and how the MAP program has helped to give them hope. Matthew,* an ex-offender and former cocaine addict who is studying ministry at Eastern Nazarene College and pursuing a career in substance abuse and spiritual counseling, said that prior to the MAP program, he wasn't so motivated. "I wasn't productive, I was lackadaisical, antisocial. I had been through a lot of jobs and had turned off from the work situation. Since coming here, I've been motivated to reapply myself. Like Rip Van Winkle, Tony came along with the bat and told me to get up....I've been reborn," he said.

Another class member, Lawrence,* said he heard positive things about MAP from another inmate while still incarcerated. As he was getting ready for discharge, MAP program director Fred Smith met with him to find out if he might be a good fit. "It seemed like Fred really wanted to help," he said. "He was the only person in my life who would sit with me and look me in the eyes. I felt like he was determined to help me," he said.

Lawrence also said that the experience of creating a "life map"—an illustrated account of his life from birth to present—at the start of the program was crucial to his growth. "I had to relive the things that happened to me, and I learned it was time to move on," he said.

MAP has made him feel like he's a part of something, and he feels a strong bond with Mr. Rello and his classmates. "We didn't even know each other before, but now it's like I've known them for years," he said.

Part of MAP's aim is to provide a kind of surrogate family to people who've burned bridges in their lives, losing contact with their loved ones as a result of addiction or violence or homelessness, said Mr. Rello. MAP instructors are also included in this opening up and bonding. During the life map exercise, Mr. Rello participated along with the students, revealing ups and downs in his life that even his family doesn't know about. Mr. Rello, a former business executive who began working for MAP eight years ago, pointed out that a trusting environment is crucial to the aims of the program. "I trust them with that information to make it easier for them to trust me. They realize that we're not so different, that I've had my own ups and downs."

* Name has been changed to protect confidentiality



(from left) Parole Board Victim Service Coordinators Kimm Yonika (Region 7), Lisa Armstrong (Region 2), and Stacey Pignatero (Region 4) at the annual agency-wide meeting on December 15.

Photograph by Paul Gallagher

Contact Parole News:

**10 Park Plaza
Suite 3720
Boston, MA.
02116**

**Phone:
617-725-3316,
3317**

**anna.kivlan@
state.ma.us**